

NEWS



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NEWARK, NJ (November 7, 1990) -- Barton Myers, an architect who admits to a "passion for the design of performing arts centers" has been commissioned to design a major cultural facility containing a 2700-seat multi-purpose hall as the first building of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center complex in Newark.

"We have devoted our practice," said Myers, a Professor of Architecture at UCLA, "to the creation of contextually responsive architecture, especially in relation to dense urban centers. It is our belief that the best public institutions are not islands, but accessible community resources which help to animate the city during the day as well as after dark."

The multi-purpose hall to be designed by Myers will also include rehearsal spaces, state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment, restaurants, cafes, patron bars and other public and private spaces. A 300-400-seat studio theater is also under consideration.

The Myers announcement was made today by Henry E. Kates, president of Mutual Benefit Life and chairman of the New Jersey

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Performing Arts Center Architect/Acoustician Selection Committee. It came at a meeting of The Mayor's Performing Arts Center Task Force held at First Fidelity Bank Corporate Headquarters. The Task Force, which includes representatives of the public and private sectors, was created by Mayor Sharpe James as an affiliate of Renaissance Newark Inc. to provide support for the Performing Arts Center. The 70-member Task Force, a volunteer group, is headed by RNI President Everett Shaw.

Myers, whose offices are in Los Angeles, was selected from among four finalists chosen from an original field of 12 of North America's leading architects. "In the course of our research and deliberations," Kates said, "the key voices which will shape architectural tastes and opinions for the better part of the 21st Century were heard."

"The subjects discussed," he explained, "revolved around how to give this great cultural and urban redevelopment vision a physical representation that will communicate to the world the importance of what's happening in New Jersey and especially in Newark."

"This is an important milestone for the City of Newark and the 4 1/2 million people who live within a 25-mile radius of the City," said Mayor Sharpe James.

"Having read and heard about the magnificent Portland Performing Arts Center designed by Mr. Myers and how it has

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contributed to the revitalization of what has become one of North America's most appealing and viable downtowns, I look forward with great excitement and anticipation to his design for the City of Newark," the mayor said.

State Senator Wynona Lipman (D-29), co-chairperson of the Mayor's Task Force and a key role player in the effort which gained state funding for the project, said the commissioning of an architect "is a proud day for me and for those colleagues in the Senate and Assembly whose shared belief in the reemergence of the City of Newark with a world class cultural complex at its center paved the way for early support of the project in the Legislature."

"This is a significant event for The Mayor's Task Force," said Jerome Greco, senior vice president of First Fidelity Bank, co-chairperson of the Mayor's Task Force. "The growth of this project as exemplified with each new announcement of progress is a tribute to the cross section of business, cultural and political leaders who believe in this City and who support its aspirations."

The decision to design and build a multi-purpose hall, which will be home to the New Jersey Symphony, as the first facility was approved and endorsed by the NJPAC Board following an exhaustive operating study which compared a concert hall of 2400 seats to a multi-purpose hall of 2700 seats.

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Following the six-month study, NJPAC concluded that a multi-purpose hall offered an opportunity for a more certain and more broadly defined early success than a concert hall, according to NJPAC President Lawrence P. Goldman.

"The multi-purpose hall," Goldman explained, "will enable the Arts Center to stage 50-70 more events per year including theater, dance and opera as well as both classical and popular music."

A critical factor in the decision, Goldman explained, was cultural diversity. "A multi-purpose hall possesses great potential to adapt to nearly all forms of the performing arts, not only music rooted primarily in 18th and 19th Century Europe."

"The challenge placed before Barton Myers," the NJPAC President said, "is to create a symbol that will speak as eloquently to a sixth grader taking her first piano lesson as it will to a culturally-informed couple which demands world class performances."

He pointed out that a multi-purpose hall could play host to the broadest range of audiences and help the NJPAC achieve its goal of welcoming and bringing together audiences of diverse racial and economic groups without altering its qualities as a world-class venue for classical music.

The plan, Goldman said, was discussed and reviewed with dozens of public and community leaders. The input of more than

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30 representatives of New Jersey or Newark-based arts and community groups was considered in the process.

The special problems inherent in designing a performing arts center which must be many things to many people is a welcome challenge to Myers who has become known for his special talents in this specialized field.

His firm has designed the Cerritos Arts Center, a \$40 million performing arts center which includes an 1,800-seat concert/multi-purpose hall currently under construction near Los Angeles and the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, a widely-published facility including a 2,700-seat concert hall, a 950-seat lyric theater and a 400-seat courtyard theater in Portland, Oregon.

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Myers also designed the Citadel Theater, an internationally-acclaimed, award-winning theater under construction on a complex urban site in downtown Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and a major addition and alterations to the Stratford Festival Theater, the national home of the Shakespearean Festival in Canada.

According to Goldman, the next step for NJPAC will be announcement of the project's master plan, which is scheduled within the next 30 days, and selection of the project acoustician. With the master plan and architect/acoustician team in place, NJPAC will move into the design phase of the project.

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"We are on schedule both in the planning stages and in the outstanding corporate leadership gifts announced thus far by Prudential and AT&T as well as financial support by the Dodge, Victoria and Schumann Foundations," Goldman said. "NJ PAC has formally moved from conceptual planning to the design table. We are on our way toward opening night."

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